

# **CSCE NEWS RELEASE**

## **Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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Washington, D.C. 20515-6460  
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# **“Albania: Finding a Way Out of the Abyss”**

## **Commission Briefing Scheduled**

**For Immediate Release  
May 15, 1997**

**Contact: Chadwick R. Gore  
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**Washington, DC**—Today the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) announced a briefing:

**Albania: Finding a Way Out of the Abyss**

**Wednesday, May 21**

**2:00-4:00 pm**

**Room 2220, Rayburn House Office Building**

**Washington, DC**

**Open to Members of Congress, Staff, the Public and the Press**

**Questions from the audience will be allowed following the presentation**

Co-sponsored by the Congressional Albanian Issues Caucus, the briefing will focus on the current turmoil in Albania, international efforts to provide assistance and restore order and economic development.

**Representative Eliot L. Engel (D-NY)**, Co-Chairman, Congressional Albanian Issues Caucus will discuss his February participation as the U.S. representative on the first Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Albania with former Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky.

The panel of experts will include:

**Janice Helwig**, CSCE Staff Advisor, U.S. Delegation to the OSCE, Vienna, Austria. Ms. Helwig will describe Mr. Vranitzky's mediation efforts and OSCE activities in preparation for Albanian elections scheduled for late June.

**Stefano Stefanini**, Counselor for Political and Security Affairs, Embassy of Italy. Mr. Stefanini

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The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The Commission, created in 1976, is made up of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Commerce and Defense. For more information about the Commission, please call (202) 225-1901.

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will discuss the 6,000-member Multilateral Protection Force (MProFor) deployed in Albania under Italian leadership to secure the delivery of humanitarian aid, and initiatives toward an international conference on Albania.

**Avni Mustafaj**, Member, Board of Directors, National Albanian-American Council, will comment on the role international non-governmental organizations can play to assist Albania's transition. Mr. Mustafaj was formerly Executive Director, Open Society Foundation for Albania.

## **Background:**

In February 1997, protest turned into open rebellion in southern Albania, quickly spread north and threatened to plunge the country into chaos and violence. Police and military authority in the areas of the rebellion collapsed. Rioters looted military weapons stockpiles and armed the local population. The collapse of get-rich-quick "pyramid schemes" in Albania—in which a large percentage of the population had invested heavily—prompted the crisis, although extreme political polarization and a slowdown in democratic development in recent years had set the stage.

In response, a Government of National Reconciliation consisting of all major political parties was created in early March, led by Prime Minister Bashkim Fino from the opposition Socialist Party. However, President Sali Berisha of the ruling Democratic Party continues to exercise power.

An eight-nation military force has been deployed in Albania to secure humanitarian aid deliveries, and Vranitzky has represented the OSCE actively seeking political consensus to resolve the crisis. The OSCE will be particularly active in organizing the elections to insure they are free and fair. Other organizations—including the European Union and the Council of Europe—are also involved. A proposed conference on Albania may consider financial assistance for what remains the poorest country in Europe.